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LARSON CONGRATULATES HARTFORD'S CONNIE NAPIER FOR CONGRESSIONAL GOLD MEDAL

Napier and other original Tuskegee Airmen awarded nation's highest civilian honor in Washington

WASHINGTON- Today, Congressman John B. Larson (CT-01) issued the following statement honoring the Tuskegee Airmen who were awarded the Congressional Gold Medal today. Surviving Airmen were presented our nation's highest civilian honor today in the Capitol Rotunda by President Bush, Speaker Nancy Pelosi and former Secretary of State Colin Powell.

Two of Larson's constituents were Tuskegee Airmen. Captain Lemuel Custis, was one of the thirteen original Airmen and sadly passed away in February 2005 at the age of 89. Flight Officer Connie Napier, Jr. originally from Hartford was in Washington today to receive his award. Mr. Napier now lives in New Britain and is father of Connecticut State Treasurer Denise Napier.

“It brings me great pleasure to see the Tuskegee Airmen receive the Congressional Gold Medal---an award and credit that they have long deserved. In particular, it brings me great pride to see my constituent, former Airman Connie Napier receive this overdue recognition. But it is with great sadness that Capitan Lemuel Custis, one of the original 13 Airmen, who passed away two years ago, is not able to receive this honor today.

“The Congressional Gold Medal is the highest honor the Congress can give to civilians and I can think of no better recipients than those who broke the racial barriers in the Armed Forces. The have left their positive footprint in history. Their brave service broke glass ceilings and paved the way for African American aviators in the military. As

Captain Custis used to say "they were fighting a war on two fronts. They were fighting the enemy in Europe and Africa and fought a Jim Crow society here at home." These men were true heroes and patriots. They rose above the obstacles set by rampant discrimination and courageously defended our democracy. We honor them today and are grateful for their valiant contribution to our country.

The Tuskegee Airmen refers to all those who were involved in the "Tuskegee Experiment," the Air Corps program to train African Americans to fly and maintain combat aircraft during World War II. The Tuskegee Airmen included pilots, navigators, bombardiers, maintenance and support staff, instructors, and the personnel who kept the planes in the air during World War II.

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